

# Development Plan for Telesales Project

Case: Company X

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## ABSTRACT

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In 2016, Company X made a decision on a new sales and marketing strategy for their company. The strategy included implementation of telesales tasks as a daily routine for the customer support team (CST) employees as a way of increasing sales and raising brand awareness. The thesis aims to analyze the telesales implementation from the CST perspective. Another aim of the thesis is to build an analysis-based development plan for further improvement.

The theoretical framework is based on secondary data research, compiled from reliable published and electronic sources. The theoretical part covers concepts and terms from the sales area, including explanations of telesales concept and its necessity for case company corporate goals. In addition, there is also a brief description of what has been done before and during the implementation of telesales project.

As for the empirical part, a qualitative research was carried out by semi-structured in-depth interviewing. The interviews were collected from case company employees, who are the actual doers of the telesales for the company. The interview results are described in the form of a report, which provides an overview for employees' feedback.

Afterwards, the theoretical and empirical parts lead to the development plan for a telesales project, which is the main objective of the thesis. Actions of the development plan are placed over a timeline in order to provide a clear action plan.

To sum up, the thesis is considered as a reliable and valid research, conducted for Company X. It can be used for the corporate needs and can be modified and applied as is needed.

Key words: telesales, development plan, customer listening, selling cycle, decision-making

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## CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	1
1.1	Thesis Background	1
1.2	Thesis Objectives, Research Question and Limitations	3
1.3	Theoretical Framework	6
1.4	Research Methodology and Data Collection	6
1.5	Thesis Structure	7
2	PREFACE IN SALES	9
2.1	Selling Process	9
2.2	Telesales and Telemarketing	11
2.3	Sales Field Definitions	12
3	PREPARATIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION OF TELESales PROJECT	17
4	EMPIRICAL RESEARCH FROM CST PERSPECTIVE	18
4.1	Interview Structure	18
4.2	Interview Design	19
4.3	Data Acquisition	20
4.4	Data Analysis	20
5	THEORETICAL RESEARCH FOR DEVELOPMENT PLAN: PROSPECT PERSPECTIVE	22
5.1	Decision-making: Definition, Process, Heuristics	22
5.2	Perception	26
5.3	Listening Perception	28
5.4	Customer Listening	30
5.5	Customer Resistance	31
6	DEVELOPMENT PLAN	35
7	CONCLUSION	36
7.1	Answers to the Research Questions	36
7.2	Validity and Reliability	37
7.3	Suggestions for Further Research	38
8	SUMMARY	39
	REFERENCES	40

## LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1. Crucial Points of the Purpose Statement	4
FIGURE 2. Thesis Structure	8
FIGURE 3. The Classical Research Model (Keegan 2009)	21
FIGURE 4. Decision-making Process (French et al. 2011)	23
FIGURE 5. Steps in Business Buying Process (Solomon et al. 2009)	24
FIGURE 6. Factors Affecting Perception (Robbins et al. 2010)	27
FIGURE 7. Attribution Theory (Robbins et al. 2010)	28

## LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1. List of Situational Factors Influencing Perception of Telesales (Roux 2008)	34
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## GLOSSARY

B2B: Business-to-business

B2C: Business-to-customers

CRM programs: Customer Relationship Management programs

CST: Customer Support Team

HR: Human Resource

IDI: In-depth interviewing

KPI: Key Performance Indicator

Lead-gen: Lead generation

NEE: North East Europe

RTP: Returnable Transit Packaging

# 1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the overview of the thesis framework. In the beginning, it describes the background of the thesis, which is followed with clearly stated objectives, research question and limitations. Furthermore, the chapter explains the theoretical and empirical frameworks and finishes with a short description of the thesis structure.

## 1.1 Thesis Background

Plastic packaging is a significant part of the global economy; its production has increased by 20 times over the past 50 years and is expected to double again in the next 20 years. This has happened, is happening and will happen again because plastics have come able to serve more markets throughout the years. Plastics packaging has always been and is going to have the largest usage – 26% of the gross quantity of plastics used. (World Economic Forum 2016.)

Increased volumes of plastic packaging are determined by economic, timesaving, productive and recycling benefits. However, the obstacles of plastics industry have great impact on the business environment. One of the obstacles is the recyclable rate of plastics: it is only 5% (in comparison with paper and iron & steel, which are 55% and 70-90% respectively). Second, is the negative impact on nature and its environment. Third, is connected with fragmentation of plastic market and economy. Lack of standardization and coordination in the value chain results in the poor organization of production process. To conclude: building competent after-use plastics economy is the main prerogative in the plastics industry. (World Economic Forum 2016.)

Thesis author believes that to make plastic industry more organized, responsible companies with recycling policies need to be encouraged and supported. An example of such a company is Company X. It is one of the leading manufacturers of returnable plastic packaging for material handling. The company has been working with returnable transit packaging (RTP) for more than 50 years. Their forefront is caring about the environment in a way that is cost-effective for business and least harmful for nature. Their products are standardized and ISO certified. Mission statements of case company claim that the company takes



responsibility for their production and uses recyclable materials. (Company X 2016.)

According to the latest Moody's report, Company X has a stable outlook and is showing significant improvement during several years. However, according to the report there is a threat from competitors in product copying and pricing pressure, which may affect standardized products. (Moody's Investors Service 2016.) TechNavio's report, which is about global RTP market, claims that increasing competition and pressure on standardized products leads to a new trend among key players. Trend is about raising brand awareness among customers and consequently, increasing sales revenue with it. (TechNavio 2016.)

In the beginning of 2016, Company X joined the trend of building marketing and sales strategies in order to raise brand awareness and increase sales. One of the major areas is building platform for creating a telesales team inside the company. The idea was to implement both cold calling to possible customers and warm calling to old customers into everyday task of the customer support team (CST). In Company X, CST people are responsible for order handling, invoicing, organizing deliveries and documents for flawless export and import of goods. And starting from this year, also for cold calling.

In the North East Europe (NEE) branch, preparation started in April and actual calling started in May. First, old customers customers were contacted. Afterwards, CST contacted new leads. After several months of activity there is a need to have an analysis of work which was already done, and a new strategic plan is necessary to be built. This is the subject of this thesis. The focus of the thesis is on the telesales campaign implementation process, its benefits and drawbacks and mitigation of these drawbacks. The empirical part of the thesis consists of qualitative interviews, conducted among CST employees in several offices of the NEE region: Baltics, Russia, Finland and Scandinavia. The result of the thesis is to report the telesales project and development plan. The outcomes of the thesis are important for companies who have already started their telesales campaigns/projects in order to raise brand awareness and become successful after a certain period of time.

## 1.2 Thesis Objectives, Research Question and Limitations

The main objective of the thesis is to create a development plan for the telesales project in the NEE region. The second goal is to create a summarizing report based on the qualitative interviews with CST employees, which is the base for the development plan. In addition, this thesis aims to:

- Introduce concepts of telesales and telemarketing, explain the differences between them and state why the company chose telesales for increasing sales activity and raising brand awareness;
- Give brief outlook on the terms which are used in the sales sphere in order to make it easier for the reader to understand the subject of the thesis much deeper;
- Support theoretic framework with a chapter about decision-making behavior, which is created by a literature review.

In order to get the reader through a study plan, researchers place signposts. First is the purpose statement, which forms a central foundation for the study. (Creswell 2014.) The purpose statement of this thesis is to analyze beginning and current situation of telesales campaign in Company X NEE from the CST's point of view – to find out the spheres and parts to upgrade and suggest improvements for company's further telesales activity. Second signpost is a research question, which narrows the purpose statement to forecasting about what result will be gained (Creswell 2014). In order to create a suitable and correct research question, which would fulfill research idea, the author of thesis made a diagram, which is displayed below, Figure 1.

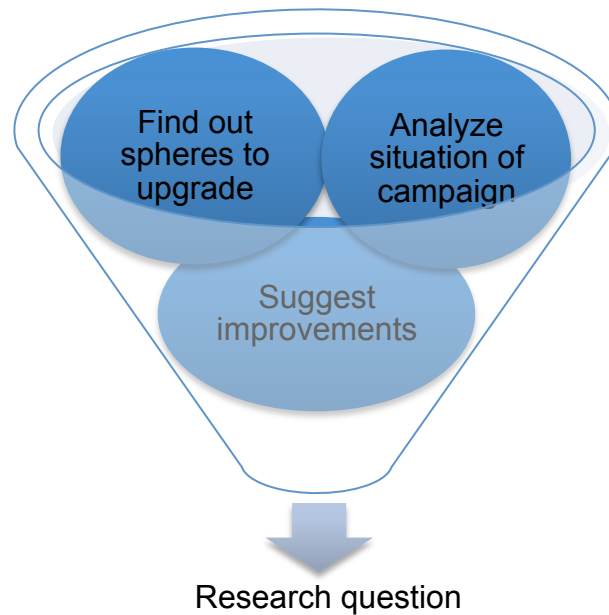


FIGURE 1. Crucial Points of the Purpose Statement

From analysis of the main points of purpose statement, the research question of the thesis is:

*How to improve implementation of telesales campaign, so that it will be normal everyday practice for CST employees and effective in generating corporate planned outcomes?*

In addition, sub-questions are necessary in order to define manageable portions of research question and keep the research focus (Fawcett & Pockett 2015). Author of the thesis created sub-questions for deeper understanding of the research question:

- 1) What is the difference between telesales and telemarketing?
- 2) How did telesales campaign start in Company X?
- 3) What was experience and challenges connected with telesales for CST employees?
- 4) How did telesales work out for the Company X?
- 5) How do prospects feel when they get a cold call?

In order to validate the research question chosen, the author of the thesis used the “Goldilocks test” to find out whether her research question was “too big”, “too small”, “too hot” or “just right”. “Too big” question means that it requires significant research. Research question of this thesis needs

qualitative interview with open-answered questions. “Too small” question means that it is probably of the small scope. Given research question is quite big, due to the area of cover (NEE region) and problem cover. “Too hot” question means that it is likely to touch sensitive topics. Author’s research question is not going to cause such problems. Eventually, “just right” question means that it is correct for researching at this time, by this researcher and in this framework. Current thesis research is right at this time because several months passed since telesales campaign started in NEE region. Researcher is suitable, because she is provided with information about case company. Framework is correct because this research does not require case company to reveal a lot of private information. (Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill 2009.)

There are certain limitations to this study which make results of the paper critical and close to reality. To begin with, the thesis is narrowed down for Company X, which means that results can be applied only to that company. Other companies might use this research in order to have general understanding of the research subject and get certain advice in dealing with telesales campaign in their own company.

In addition, there are also limitations connected with the qualitative research made. To begin with, language issues: English is not a native language for the interviewer or interviewees. It increases risk of miscommunication, which may impact the end result. Next one is timing, researcher had very limited amount of time for interviewing, which was provided by supervisor. Following limitation is connection issue – since most of the interviews were completed via Skype and sometimes connection was a little bit broken, which could also influence the data analysis. Last limitation is amount of interviewed people. The only CST employees that were interviewed were from the Finnish, Russian and Baltics office. However, not all CST employees in Scandinavia were covered with interviewing due to their unavailability or sick leave. This factor, certainly, narrows down the validity of Scandinavian research.

Furthermore, author would like to include time as a limitation. The development plan was started in October 2016, due to the time limitation of the thesis deadline. Moreover, this happened because the process of implementation finishes up in the end of September 2016. Due to telesales being an ongoing project, it continued after the events, which are described in the Chapter 3. To sum up, limitation for this thesis is that

some parts of development plan could be carried out after the thesis was ready.

### 1.3 Theoretical Framework

One of the most demanding parts of research building is the statement of theoretical framework that created the research's design and the interpretation of the data (Fawcett & Pockett 2015). This part gives a brief overview of the topics used for the research process.

Chapter 2 explains the concept of telesales as part of seven-step selling process and what differs telesales from telemarketing. In addition, it explains the concepts, which are used in salesperson's life such as lead, prospect, customer and etc. in order to make it clearer for the reader to go through the empirical part. In addition, the chapter covers the influence of telesales on corporate activity in order to be logically connected with Chapter 3.

Chapter 3 covers the background for the empirical research. It explains Company X's setting of goals and expectations before starting the campaign, how it was prepared, how it was started, carried out and implemented.

After the empirical part, comes Chapter 5, which informs the reader about the secondary data research about customer perspective on telesales. It gives general information about decision-making process and perception as well as customer reaction on calling. Chapter ends with subchapter about phenomenon called "customer resistance", which explains prospects' behavior during the calls. This chapter was created in order to expand the basis for the development plan. It is not only based on the result of empirical research from CST point of view, but also add customer perspective to the development plan.

### 1.4 Research Methodology and Data Collection

This sub-chapter covers the research methodology and data collection methods, which created the empirical part of the thesis. This part starts with the research approach, then is followed by the data collection method and then finishes with sources used.

There are two kinds of research approaches: deductive and inductive. Deductive approach is about the development of the theory, which requires accurate testing. Inductive approach is about generating data and building analysis and theory upon it. (Saunders et al. 2009.) Consequently, since induction highlights close meaning of the research context, the approach of this thesis research is inductive.

There are two types of data collected: qualitative and quantitative. Qualitative data is based on the context expressed through words and analysis conducted through use of conceptualization. Quantitative data is about numbers and number analysis made with help of statistics and diagrams. (Saunders et al. 2009.) This thesis uses qualitative data collection methods, which consists of qualitative interviews with open questions.

In this research two types of data are used: primary and secondary. Primary data is new data created for the specific needs of a research. Secondary data is reanalyzed data from published or electronic sources for needs of research. (Saunders et al. 2009.)

## 1.5 Thesis Structure

The thesis is divided into seven chapters. First chapter gives brief overview of the background of the thesis, its objectives, purposes and limitations, states a research question and gives theoretical and empirical framework. Second and third chapter are theoretical: they explain concepts used in sales sphere and is about the creation and implementation of a telesales campaign in Company X. Fourth chapter belongs to the empirical part of the study: interviewing CST employees and it also contains report based on the results of interview analysis. Fifth chapter provides secondary data analysis of customer perspective on cold calling. Sixth chapter gives development plan for Company X for telesales campaign. Seventh chapter answers the research question, draws conclusions and gives suggestions for improvement. Figure 2 illustrates the entire structure of the thesis.

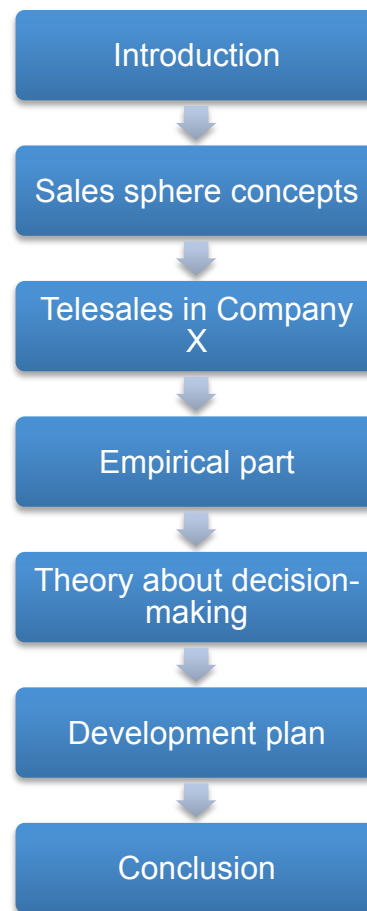


FIGURE 2. Thesis Structure

## 2 PREFACE IN SALES

### 2.1 Selling Process

The seven steps of selling is a traditional framework of sales process, described in various sales' textbooks and periodicals. This sequence of steps is considered to be the basis of sales education and base for the process of making sales. In the beginning of 21st century the traditional framework started to change due to world digitalization. However, despite this fact, seven steps of selling are still useful for a salesperson. (Moncrief & Marshall 2005.)

Typical scenario, created by this framework, consists of following sequence:

- 1) Prospecting,
- 2) Pre-approach,
- 3) Approach,
- 4) Presentation,
- 5) Overcoming objections,
- 6) Closing,
- 7) Follow-up.

This framework, without the last step: follow-up, existed in sales textbooks for more than 80 years. "Follow-up" step was added recently, about 20 years ago. (Moncrief & Marshall 2005.)

The first step of the selling process is prospecting. Prospecting is the method of seeking for potential customers, known in the sales sphere as prospects. Reason for prospecting is to expand the customer database as companies always have a risk of losing customers. Therefore, prospecting is usually a screening procedure of qualifying the prospect. (Moncrief & Marshall 2005.)

Next step is known as pre-approach. This step includes all activities after prospecting but before actual personal contact or visit with the customer.



Sales calling or telesales is part of this pre-approach step. Sellers do the prospect research and discover prospect's needs while calling or contacting customer in non-personal way e.g. emails, surveys, correspondence. Putting together new and relevant material, which will be suitable for sales call itself is also part of the pre-approach step. In addition, pre-approach tasks include talking with gatekeepers, researching the customer (individual and corporate), mentally getting ready for the approach and presentation and screening customer's office while entering. (Moncrief & Marshall 2005.)

Following step is approach. On the sales process timeline, it happens during first minutes of actual sale. Importance of this step is in gaining trust in audience and establishing the first rapport with client, using certain tactics and strategies. This includes small talk, handshake, eye contact or, in a nutshell, making good first impression. (Moncrief & Marshall 2005.)

Presentation step is the main part of sales visit or sales call and it ought to appear after salesperson has found customer needs. This step can be completed with one or even multiple presentations during certain period of time. Goals for sales presentation depend on the type of customer. For instance, if the salesperson is dealing with the buyer/customer for the first time, the goal will be to provide plentiful information for sufficient understanding of products'/services' benefits which possibly can be done by having a presentation with a product demonstration. Since this step is very crucial and complicated, preparation is essential and necessary. (Moncrief & Marshall 2005.)

After the presentation, customers will have certain questions, comments, opinions and hesitations which can be classified as objections for the salesperson and consequently, overcoming objections is the next step for the salesperson. Despite the fact that objections can hold the sales process, usually they should be taken as a positive and useful thing. This is because with the help of unfolding objections, correct customer needs can be revealed. (Moncrief & Marshall 2005.)

Following after overcoming the objections, comes the close. Close is determined as successful completion of selling presentation finishing into commitment to buy the product or service. As soon as objections have been resolved, salesperson should ask for the business and thus start the process of closing the sale. This step is always considered to be

complicated since many customers do not ask for order. (Moncrief & Marshall 2005.)

Last step is follow-up, which implies that sale does not stop with order acceptance. Fairly, salesperson needs to put effort to make sure that customer is satisfied and happy with product/service, with delivery and everything, which was promised was carried out. Thank-you letter and following phone calls asking if customer is happy are good examples for follow-up step. (Moncrief & Marshall 2005.)

During the last thirty years, seven steps of selling have been transformed into a more advance sales process, which has become relationship-oriented. This happened due to certain factors such as development of technology, increase of strategic role of selling inside the companies, team-based approaches for sales and increased buyer knowledge and sophistication. Nowadays, this so-called “evolved selling process” includes such things as Customer Relation Maintenance or CRM and Database and Knowledge Management. (Moncrief & Marshall 2005.)

All things considered, telesales is part of the approach and presentation steps for the current case company since the main objective for the calls is to raise brand awareness and increase sales, meaning present company and its products.

## 2.2 Telesales and Telemarketing

In the business world there is a confusion between the terms “telemarketing” and “telesales”. Aim of this sub-chapter is to put clear distinction between these terms by giving definitions, explaining concepts, stating benefits of those and in the end, give brief explanation why telesales is better for Company X.

In general, telemarketing and telesales belong to the type of service, which involves interpersonal communication with consumers and business customers that takes place over the phone. (Solomon, Marshall, Stewart 2009.) Telemarketing is a service, which creates interest, generates opportunities, gives information and records customer feedback, set appointments and expands leads by phone. Telesales, on the other hand, is a service that sells corporates’/companies’ products or services straight to the customer by phone. In other words, telemarketing generates

prospects, lets people know what companies have to offer them and gives a chance for both client and business to investigate more about each other. Telesales turns opportunities into customers and client base for the company. (Dickens 2015.)

Since the primary aim of the thesis focuses on telesales, the following information on this subchapter will only be about telesales in order to avoid confusion for the reader. Benefits of telesales start with profitability for business markets. Business-to-customer calls have smaller profitability result than business-to-business because it costs far less to keep in touch with small customers by phone rather than visiting them personally by salespeople. (Solomon et al. 2009.) Moreover, expanding customer base by turning difficult leads into customers is also very beneficial, allowing for company to increase revenue. In addition, telesales creates a professional image and impression for the companies. (Dickens 2015.)

To sum it up, telesales is better for Company X than telemarketing because it allows opportunities to turn into customers, reaching difficult leads, decreasing travel costs for salespeople, expanding customer base and raising brand awareness among old and new customers.

### 2.3 Sales Field Definitions

This sub-chapter aims at providing definitions with explanations of the terms used in the sales field in any company and which might not be familiar for the reader of the thesis. Author provides explanation of the most common terms of salespeople, which were used in the thesis. Terms are given in the alphabetical order.

**Business-to-business selling (B2B)** – interaction between two or more organizations, where main purpose is to sell by meeting primary needs of organization for a particular product or service for corporate operations. (Solomon et al. 2009; Kotler & Armstrong 2012.)

There are three types of buying activities: straight rebuy, modified rebuy and the new task. A buying activity is called the straight rebuy when companies already have a supplier and places a reorder. This reordering process is always a routine and involves only little amount of members of the buying center. Usually these members are purchasing agents and

users of product. In general: user asks the purchaser to replenish the stock. Little evaluation of information is expected. (Clow & Baack 2014.)

When buying center assesses and considers alternatives, this type of buying activity is called a modified rebuy. Modified rebuy purchase is able to happen due to four reasons: dissatisfaction with current supplier, alluring offer from another vendor, termination of contract agreement with ongoing vendor, limited practice with the good or service. (Clow & Baack 2014.)

When a customer company starts to consider new good or service for the first time or customer decided to come back to the purchase which had happened long period of time ago, it is called a new task purchasing situation. Normally, this type of purchase requires the participation of a large number of buying center members. Great amount of time will be spent to collect information and assessing vendors. (Clow & Baack 2014.)

**Buying center** – it is group of individuals who has purchase decision power on the behalf of the company, which makes buyer decisions more difficult. Buying center includes five particular roles such as:

- Users – employees who are actual users of service or product;
- Buyers – employees who are responsible for purchasing;
- Influencers – people, who obtain specific knowledge of product/service needed to buy and therefore can influence purchasing decision with advice and opinion. For example, if a company buys computers for corporate needs, influencer (who is IT specialist in this case) can provide advice on which software is needed, what programs is necessary to install and etc;
- Deciders – individuals who hold power to authorize and approve the purchase decision;
- Gatekeepers – employees who manage information flow for the members of buying center. (Clow & Baack 2014.)

**Cold calling** – it is another term for telesales or telemarketing. Word “cold” is used because salesperson contacts prospects without any first introduction or arrangement and salesperson does not know prospects personally. (Solomon et al. 2009.)

**Customer Relationship Management or CRM** – it is crucial business strategy that coordinates internal processes and external networks in order to invent and bring value to a focused group of customers profitably. It is based on first-rate customer-related data and facilitated by information technology, called CRM software. (Buttle & Maklan 2015.) CRM programs support companies with databases to customize products and communications with customers in order to get higher revenues and profits (Clow & Baack 2014).

There are three types of CRM: strategic, operational and analytical. Strategic CRM is an essential customer-oriented business strategy with a goal of gaining and retaining profitable customer. Operational CRM is focusing on the computerization of the process connected with customers such as selling, marketing and customer service. Analytical CRM is the process when companies convert customer-related data into actionable understanding for strategic and tactical objectives. (Buttle & Maklan 2015.)

However, as it happens with all crucial management activities, there are five frequent misunderstanding about CRM's nature (Buttle & Maklan 2015):

- Misunderstanding 1: CRM is simply database marketing.

Reality: CRM is much broader than database marketing. Database marketing is only small part among CRM functions.

- Misunderstanding 2: CRM is a marketing process.

Reality: CRM functions include different types of marketing activities, however it also has vast amount of selling activities and service functions as well as it is a good aid for employees connected with human resource (HR).

- Misunderstanding 3: CRM is an IT concern.

Reality: There is no doubt that IT is a necessary base for CRM to existing. However, outstanding CRM implementation includes involvement of employees creating and implementing process that bring customer and corporate value.

- Misunderstanding 4: CRM concerns about loyalty schemes.

Reality: Some CRM implementations are connected to the loyalty schemes, some are not – it depends on the company activity and business.

- Misunderstanding 5: Any company can execute CRM.

Reality: Any company can implement strategic and operational CRM because their nature is universal and adaptable. However, analytical CRM is grounded on the customer-related data and if company misses this kind of data then analytical CRM cannot be executed. (Buttle & Maklan 2015.)

**Key Performance Indicator (KPI)** – is a set of measures aiming at those aspects of organizational performance, which are the most crucial for the present and future prosperity of the organization (Parmenter 2010).

**Lead (inquiry/er)** – is someone who is interested for more information about product or service (Obermayer 2007).

**Lead generation or (lead-gen)** – marketing term, which means transforming of potential customer interest (inquiry) into company's products or services (Greenberg 2009).

**Opportunity** – it is record of future sale or other kind of revenue creation (Buttle & Maklan 2015).

**Prospects** – people who have answered profile questions, which allows effective discovering of needs in order to understand their buying motivation and degree of interest (Obermayer 2007).

According to Buttle & Maklan (2015) possible sources of B2B prospects can be:

- Feedback and referenced from satisfied clients,
- Online resources (search engines, corporate website, social media),
- Networking,
- Promotion (exhibitions, seminars, workshops, tradeshow, conferences, events),
- Bought lists,
- Telemarketing.

**Return On Investment or ROI** – it is direct financial influence of company's expenses of resources such as time and money (Solomon et al. 2009).

**Sales Stages** – as soon as lead is received by salesperson, it starts to go through filtering process which will define either lead will be disqualified or it follow up to the next step. Here are the steps of the Sales Stages pipeline:

- Sales Lead or Sales Ready lead – it is a qualified lead, which got approved by the seriousness of the customer;
- Discovery – mutual decision between companies if they want to collaborate and if the needs of the buyer are met by the seller;
- Validation – Stage of sending samples, showing demonstrations, webinars in order to prove validity of the offered product/service;
- Working Opportunity – when leads have high possibility to create revenue for a salesperson;
- Proposal or Quoting – sales presentation or pitch in the written form in order to raise prospect interest;
- Negotiation/Sales Pending – stage where sales negotiation takes place;
- Closing the sales: either it is won or lost. (Obermayer 2007.)

### 3 PREPARATIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION OF TELESales PROJECT

This chapter was created in order to give a summary of the telesales project in Company X. Aim of the chapter was to explain the background of telesales, its preparation in NEE, implementation and carrying it out. Events, which were described in this chapter happened in the period starting from February 2016 and finished in September 2016. The telesales project is still ongoing in the company, so this chapter reported past events due to the deadline of thesis.



## 4 EMPIRICAL RESEARCH FROM CST PERSPECTIVE

This chapter provides information about the empirical part, which was created in order to answer the research question and achieve the goals of thesis. The chapter explains qualitative research in the form of semi-structured in-depth interview, design of the interview, process of collection of the data and data analysis. In addition, author created a report, which contains CST feedback on the telesales process: their attitude towards it, experience and feelings. Report also contains suggestions for improvement from CST employees and discussions about telesales implementations and development.

### 4.1 Interview Structure

For thesis purpose there was created an in-depth interview in order to collect necessary information for the answering of the research question, which was stated in the first chapter of the thesis.

In-depth interviewing or shortly IDI – is the interviewing, which aim is to acquire full understanding of the “thinking” which influences behavior and attitudes towards the subject of research interest. IDI consists of interviewer and interviewee who create one-by-one dialogue, where leader is interviewer and the purpose of this dialogue is to determine the personal matter of the interviewee regarding the subject of interview. (Roller & Lavrakas 2015.)

The interview design can be done in three types: structured, semi-structured and unstructured. Structured interview is formal type, with interviewer asking the exact number of questions prepared beforehand and in the exact order. Semi-structured interview is basically a conversation between interviewer and interviewee with prepared set of questions. However, the order and modification of questions can be changed in order to match the case of interviewee. Unstructured interview is generally a monologue said by interviewee, which can be directed by interviewer. In most cases, interviewer takes a place of active listener, while interviewee keeps on talking. (Roller & Lavrakas 2015.)

This study uses the semi-structured interview type because the interview was done with people from different cultures and different level of experience with telesales. That is why the order, amount and formulation

of question was different – in order to match the interviewee’s way of answering.

## 4.2 Interview Design

According to Roller and Lavrakas (2015) IDI design consists of “nine steps for interviewing” such as:

- Identifying research question,
- Choosing right interviewees,
- Selecting an interview method and mode,
- Deciding on type of recording of the content of interviews,
- Creating the interview guide,
- Carrying out the pilot interviews,
- Choosing the right location (in case of personal interviews),
- Having agreement with interviewees,
- Conducting the interviews with use of proper interview techniques.

Since the research question is connected with the improvement of telesales implementation for the CST employees, to make it more efficient in achieving the corporate goals, therefore, the purpose for semi-structured interviews for this thesis is to acquire the primary data on the feedback of CST people towards the telesales. CST perspective is significant in this research because CST employees are actual doers of the phone calls; they are the ones, who have this task on the daily basis. Moreover, marketing director who is the coordinator of this telesales project in NEE also answered several questions of the interview. This happened because she also attended the interviews with every interviewee as a supervisor.

After the goals for the interviews were set, the interview mode was selected – semi-structured in-depth interviewing. Reasons for the author’s choice for this type of interviewing was explained in the previous sub-chapter. The mode of the interviewing used was the personal interviewing. However, several interviews were done via Skype due to it being impossible for author to be in other branch offices in person due to the time constraints of the thesis.

After choosing the type of recording (which will be explained more detailed in the next sub-chapter), the author developed the interview guide as a set

of bullet points of the information, which was necessary to acquire for further research.

Following the creation of the interview guide, author designed an interview, which consisted of 12 questions and three sub-questions in case of clarification. In total 15 questions were prepared beforehand to be asked on the interview.

Unfortunately, the pilot interview was not conducted due to how busy CST employees were in autumn time, when thesis author conducted the research.

### 4.3 Data Acquisition

For the more complete picture of telesales in NEE, CST employees were asked from different offices.

Interview results were acquired during one day: 29<sup>th</sup> September 2016 in office of Company X. As it was said earlier in previous chapter, there was interview personally and via Skype. The language of interviewing was English with all interviewees. Length of interviewing was on average 30 minutes per person.

Interviews were carefully recorded on tape in order not to lose the valuable peculiarities of the speech and answers. Interviewees were asked beforehand whether they agree to be recorded. Nobody had negative reaction with voice recording since researcher assured that all the results are going to be anonymous and the actual voice record will not be heard by anyone or used for any other purposes except the researcher and for research purposes.

Moreover, before starting the interviews, thesis author explained the purposes of the interviewing, purpose of this research, how the research results would help with continuing with thesis and why the interviewee was important to be interviewed by thesis author.

### 4.4 Data Analysis

For the audio or video record of interview, it is useful to translate this unsorted data into written text or in other words, create a transcript. Such

transcripts represent detailed and available version of the data. (O'Reilly & Kiyimba 2015.) Before starting data analysis, author made a paper transcription of the voice recording in order to study carefully the information, which had been said by the interviewees.

As it was mentioned before, in this qualitative data analysis the author used inductive reasoning for better understanding the data collected. As for the research model, the author decided against her choice on the classical research model.

Classical research model represents research as a staged process, which consists of several steps following each other in the linear way. Only when previous step was completed, researcher can move to the next one. When the research problem is found and research question is stated, researcher can start gathering the data, which is unorganized or “dirty” at first. Afterwards, data is “cleaned” or structured for the further analysis. After analyzing, comes the organized and logical outcome of the research. (Keegan 2009.) Figure 3 below gives brief overview on the classical research model.



FIGURE 3. The Classical Research Model (Keegan 2009)

The results of data analysis was presented in the next sub-chapter in the form of report about what feedback CST employees have about the telesales and what was their experience with it.

## 5 THEORETICAL RESEARCH FOR DEVELOPMENT PLAN: PROSPECT PERSPECTIVE

In order to create a development plan from a wider perspective, author of the thesis decided to conduct a secondary data analysis in order to understand the prospects' perspective on the telesales and communication over the phone. This chapter introduces basic concepts of the decision-making process and narrows down to the customer listening and reaction to the telesales. Chapter finishes with summary, which gives a brief overview on customer behavior and reaction to the telesales.

### 5.1 Decision-making: Definition, Process, Heuristics

Everyday people deal with infinite range of decisions, which they need to make. Any choice of any importance between several alternatives is a decision-making. In a nutshell, decision-making process is the cognitive process, which happens while choosing between possible alternatives. (Gilhooly & Lyddy & Pollick 2014.)

Generally, decision-making process can be divided into four steps. First step is to determine the problem or opportunity and in addition, true nature of the problem is necessary to be evaluated. The next step is to recognize and analyze alternative ways of action and detect criteria for evaluation of alternative. Afterwards, on the next step people make a choice for a selected course of action and finally, decision is carried out. In order to have clear vision of the steps of decision-making process, Figure 4 is presented below. (French & Rayner & Rees & Rumbles 2011.)

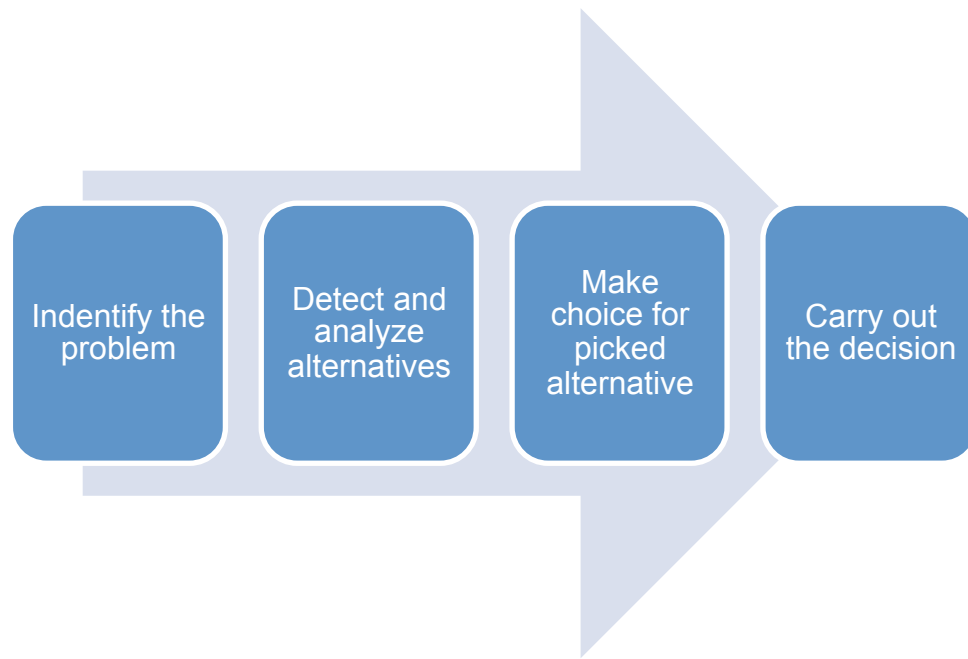


FIGURE 4. Decision-making Process (French et al. 2011)

When it comes to the business buying decision-making process, this process is narrower, particular and detailed because it relates to the complicated and challenging process of choosing product or service in order to fulfill needs of company. Since the goal is to become attentive to the corporate needs and meet them, business buying decision process gets more sophisticated. (Solomon et al. 2009.)

There are five steps for the business buying decision-making process. They are: identify the problem, seeking for information, alternative assessment, selection of the product and vendor and assessment of the post-purchase. In order to get a better picture of the business buying decision-making process, Figure 5 is presented below. (Solomon et al. 2009.)

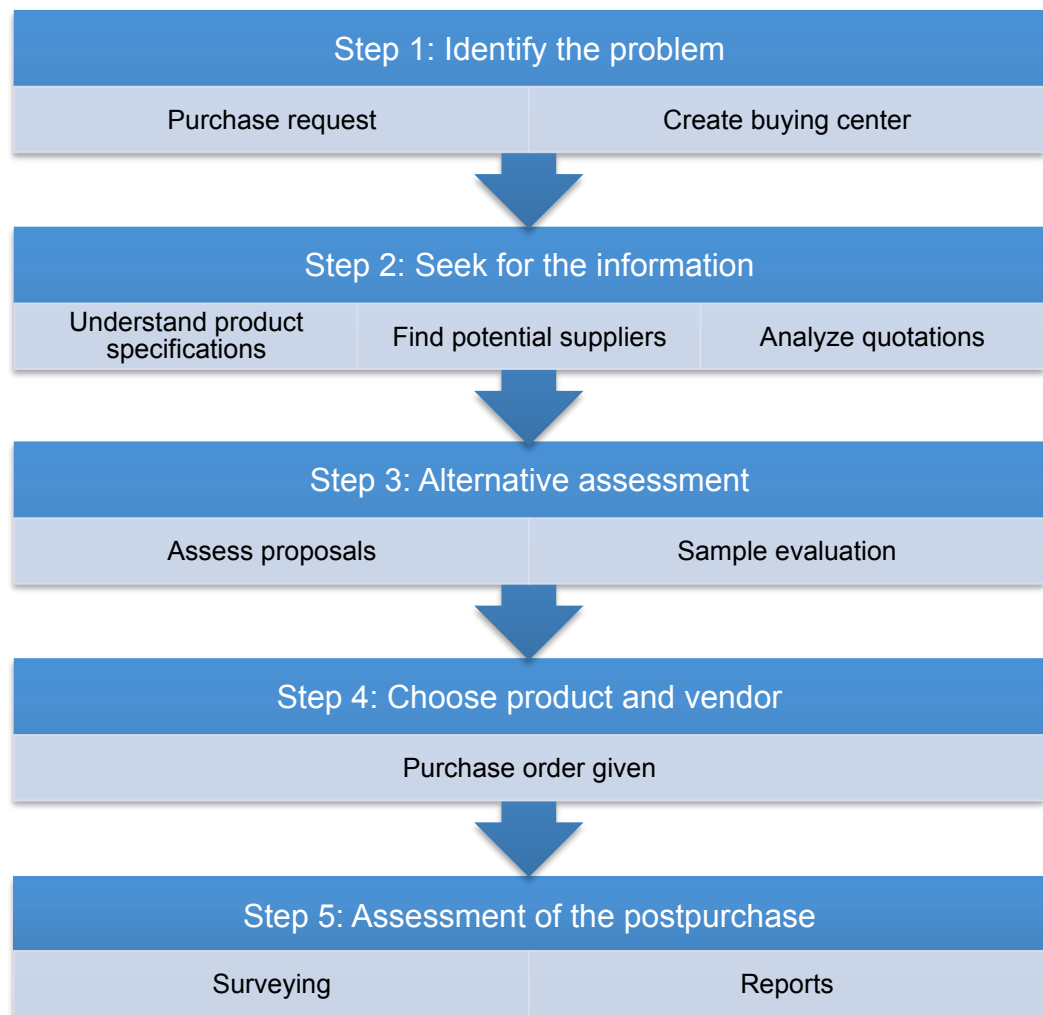


FIGURE 5. Steps in Business Buying Process (Solomon et al. 2009)

Theorists in the field of decision-making process claim that there are two different approaches to decision-making: classical and behavioral (French et al. 2011).

Classical decision theory is based on the person, who is acting in the world of complete certainty (French et al. 2011). In other words, it is consumer/customer with rational perspective. Perspective is considered rational when customer obtains all information about the product, considers advantages and drawbacks of the each alternative and makes logical, rational decision, based on this complete information. As a result, it is expected from marketers and sellers to emphasize appropriate qualities, benefits and features of the product in order to meet the needs of rational decision-making process in customer's mind. (Solomon 2013.)

On the contrary, if to recall that many of people's everyday small purchasing decisions is not following these logically rational steps, but happen spontaneously and with no planning. For instance, like buying candy while waiting in the queue in the supermarket or pastry because of the smell next to the entrance to the supermarket – these and other phenomenon give birth to the new perspective in decision-making process-behavioral theory. (Solomon 2013.) Behavioral decision theory is grounded on the idea that people make a decision regarding to their perception about situation given (French et al. 2011). In other words, people are involved in the decision but they cannot explain it rationally. That is why nowadays marketers do care more about attention-grabbing packaging rather than on the factual details. (Solomon 2013.)

One more hard proof of the behavioral model of decision-making is phenomenon called heuristics. Heuristics or so-called “rules of thumb” are simplifying strategies which people use in the decision-making in order to do it quickly. Heuristics are beneficial if they cope with uncertainty and limited information and knowledge. On the other hand, they can also bring to methodic errors. (French et al. 2011.)

In order to give to the reader idea about what heuristics are, author of the thesis gives below several examples of heuristics which are used while making purchase decision.

Possibly one of the most frequent heuristic is *brand loyalty*. Brand loyalty is sequence of repeat product purchases together with optimistic attitude toward the certain brand. This repeatable buying sequence in behavior is grounded on the assumption that the brand makes products, which are far better than the products of other brands of its competition. (Solomon et al. 2009.)

Another very common heuristic is *country-of-origin*. Country-of-origin is generally an association of certain products with particular countries where products tend to benefit from these correlations. Consumers usually rely on this heuristic when other information is, in order to make a purchase decision. (Solomon 2013.)

*Product signal* is also a very frequent heuristic, which determines customer choice. Product signal is judgment of the item by its appearance.



That is why it is easier to sell an old car with new polish than an old car without any additions to its appearance. (Solomon 2013.)

*Elimination-by-Aspects rule* applies when buyer makes assessment of brands with use of the most important criteria and eliminating the others in order to make purchase decision. (Solomon 2013.)

Generally, customers tend to make decisions irrationally or from behavioral perspective, when product/ service choice depends on the perception of the customers, which comes from the amount of the information available.

## 5.2 Perception

Perception is a process by which people set up and explain their sensory impressions as to understand their environment. Subjective perception can considerably differ from the objective reality. Studying of the customer perception is significant for understanding the motives of their behavior. (Robbins & Judge & Campbell 2010.)

There are number of factors which explain why individuals might perceive same thing differently. They are divided into three groups: personal characteristics, target factors and situational factors. Figure 6 after this paragraph gives brief overview of the factors. (Robbins et al. 2010.)

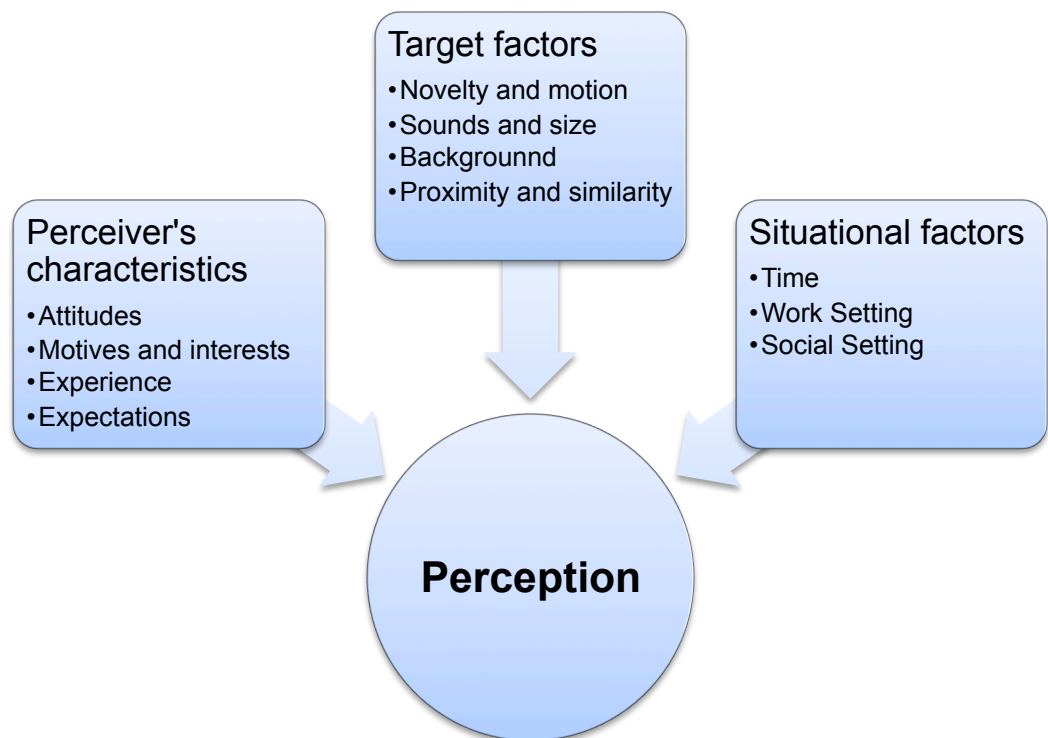


FIGURE 6. Factors Affecting Perception (Robbins et al. 2010)

One more thing, which proves that human perception is irrational, is attribution theory. Attribution theory is a pursuit to interpret if individual's behavior is internally or externally caused. Internally caused behavior means behavior, which is believed to be under control of individual (in his mind). Externally caused behavior is situational, which was imagined to force individual's behavior. (Robbins et al. 2010.)

According to Robbins et al. (2010), the behavior interpretation is based on three factors:

1. Distinctiveness: whether individual shows different behavior in different situations.
2. Consensus: whether individuals show similar behavior in same situations.
3. Consistency: whether individual shows regularity in his/her actions.

Therefore, human perceiving of other people's behavior comes through stages of:

1. Observation – what actually individual has done.
2. Interpretation – whether this is distinct, consensual or consistent behavior.
3. Attribution of cause – whether action was under personal control or influenced by something external.

Figure 7 explains three stages of perception from attribution theory. (Robbins et al. 2010.)

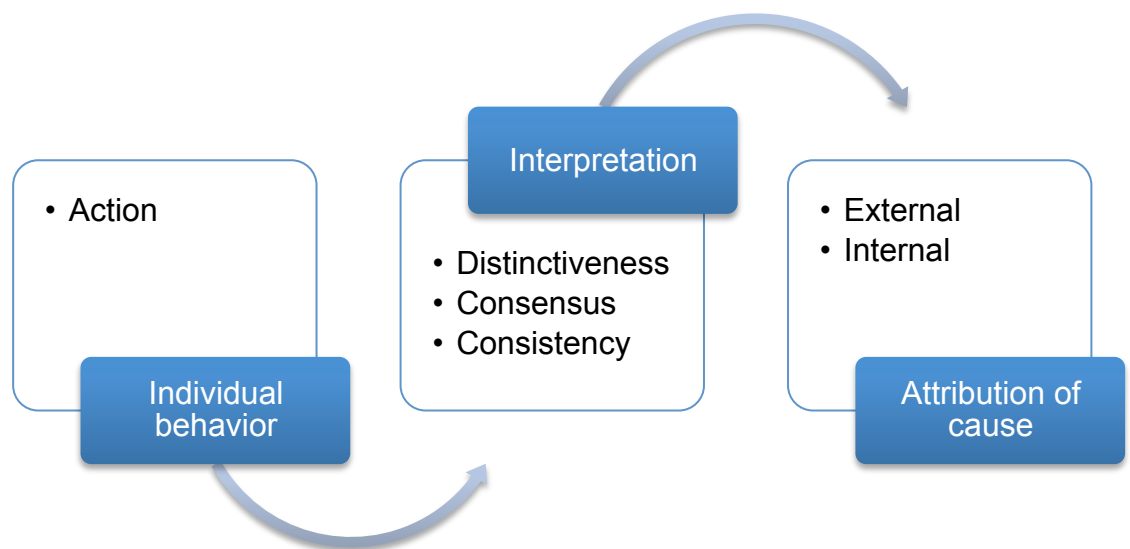


FIGURE 7. Attribution Theory (Robbins et al. 2010)

### 5.3 Listening Perception

This sub-chapter was created in order to give brief overview of the types of human listening, because different situations require different listening and therefore different kind of perception occurs. In the business world it might happen that during calls people might not understand each other due to the poor listening skills. Consequently, author sees an importance to include this sub-chapter for the reader's to gain a better understanding of listening behavior in case of each listening type. In the end author gives small description on how language has an impact on listening perception.

In general, researchers highlight several types of listening, which people naturally have. One of them is informative listening, when listener's primary goal is to understand the message. Listeners remember as much information when the meaning they give to messages is similar to what sender wanted to pass. In other words, informative listening is listening to understand the message. If there is case that sender intends to keep attention of the listeners, (s)he should remember three things:

- Expand vocabulary of listener, so that he will understand,
- Keep his/her concentration,
- After completion of first two, information will go straight to listener's memory. (Kline 1996.)

Next type is relationship listening, which occurs when purpose of listening is to help sender or improve the relationship. Focus is on understanding the feelings of sender. In order to effectively understand the sender, there are three key behaviors:

- Attending: or paying real attention. Most important here is listener's reaction to the sender's speech,
- Supporting: being patient and concerned about the sender,
- Empathizing: in other words, feeling and thinking with sender. (Kline 1996.)

Following type is appreciative listening, or listening for enjoyment. What identifies the appreciative listening is response of the listener, his reaction. Appreciative listening depends on how well sender presented the message, perception of listener and listener's previous experience. (Kline 1996.)

Art of critical listening is also significant in any sphere of life, especially when being at the working place. Critical listening gives birth for critical thinking as well. These two qualities always play together. Critical listening allows understanding of speaker's credibility, his/her logical arguments and psychological appeals or emotional element of communication. Last one is especially important with critical listening, because it makes easier for listener to identify the focus of the speaker's message. (Kline 1996.)

Last type of listening is the most crucial one, because this is base for the other four types. Name of it is discriminative listening. This is important

because it makes four types much stronger to perceive. What distinguishes discriminant listening from others is ability to detect changes in rate, volume, force, pitch, pauses, emphasis and other nonverbal cues in sender's speech. (Kline 1996.)

In addition, nowadays there are researches, which prove that language influences human perception. It happens because language gives a medium to illustrate people, places and events, which are currently out from current context. (Landau, Aziz-Zadeh, Ivry 2010.) Moreover, mother tongue of person shapes his/her thoughts about many aspects of the world, which also includes concepts of space, time, casualty and relationships. Therefore, while listening to the speaker telling the story, listener should always remember about cultural difference in the mindsets in order to understand his/her point of view. (Moxley 2016.)

#### 5.4 Customer Listening

In telesales context, message senders and receivers are not able to see each other and entrust that much on nonverbal communication. Only verbal and paraverbal meanings are available. That is why customer listening becomes very crucial for telesales agent as it helps to adapt to the customer needs and then build strong relationships. (Koehl & Poujol & Tanner 2016.)

Generally, customer listening belongs to the relationship listening type. Customer listening is the cognitive process of sincerely sensing, interpreting, assessing and responding to the verbal and non-verbal cues of present customers or potential leads. In other words, customer listening is listening behavior of telesales agent towards potential customers over the phone. (Koehl et al. 2016.)

Listening in general includes four steps or SIER:

1. Sensing (hearing all stimuli which comes from sender),
2. Interpreting (finding out meaning of what was said by sender),
3. Assessing (conversion of what was heard into information and then sorting out data which brings importance),
4. Responding (building of answer which implies the understanding of the message heard).

However, customer listening process narrows down to the three-step process: Hearing, Processing and Responding where telesales person moving through this sequence, firstly, would hear actual meaning of the words without paraverbal cues, then process the total message with paraverbal cues and afterwards, reply to the customer in order to carry on the conversation. (Koehl et al. 2016.)

In order to strengthen customer listening, the empathy is necessary to be present together with customer listening. Empathy has three forms: thought (verbal perspective), emotion (emotional perspective) and action (readiness for interactional adjustment). In other words, empathy is active form of listening, as it puts listener to someone else's shoes. (Koehl et al. 2016.)

All things considered, there come four dimensions of the customer listening: passive, active, adaptive and assertive listening. Each of these dimensions can be correlated with step of the listening process. For instance, starting from passive listening – this listening is only about listening to the message over phone, being welcoming and responsive. This perspective does not demand asking about customer's needs and correlates with Hearing step of listening process. Opposite to passive, active listening requires expressing empathy and curiosity by asking questions and approving main points. Telesales agent aims at continuous conversation, which is compared to Processing step of the listening process. (Koehl et al. 2016.)

On the contrary, adaptive and assertive listening is together compared to the Responding step of the listening process. Adaptive listening is about giving responses adapted to messages sent by prospect. Assertive listening comes when agent actively responds to the client with showing his/her professionalism and at the same time respects prospect's needs and does not jump to the hurried conclusions. (Koehl et al. 2016.)

## 5.5 Customer Resistance

Despite the fact that telesales agents are willing to listen to the prospects called because they had been trained for that, still nowadays the phenomenon of the customer resistance is very common among cold-calling. The study of Dominique Roux (2008) explored this phenomenon by analyzing of individuals' perception on telesales. This sub-chapter is

presented to describe the findings of the study, as it will be useful in the building of development plan for the Company X.

Researcher claims that customer obtain series of beliefs about him/herself. First belief is about own mental state and mental processes. Second concerns about persuasion and influence techniques and third connects to experiences that company has in those techniques. These three beliefs are the base for so-called “marketplace metacognition”. In general, marketplace metacognition is customer’s awareness about persuasion techniques, their current state and effectiveness and customer’s own perceptivity to them. Cognitive models like that are different for every person and are connected to the previous experience, culture, environment and social interactions. Therefore, marketplace metacognition can be considered as a perspective of the prospect to the telesales. (Roux 2008.)

There is a certain cause that builds marketplace metacognition, which wakes up as soon as prospect spots the attempts to influence him/her. Basically, it is the previous experience which prospect could have with telesales incoming calls. In most cases it is negative due to the several issues like:

- Impersonal nature of the call. Prospects feel that they were chosen from the bought database, which was created most likely in random order. They may notice that by conversational mistakes, which telesales agents can make. Moreover, that telesales operator voice and tone can also annoy prospect since it shows that numerous calls were made before;
- Fear. Customers are afraid of being trapped by some kind of persuasion technique or very attractive offer;
- Telesales agent’s personality. Arrogant and pushy behavior does not add attractiveness to the sales calls;
- Pressure. Insisting persuasive conversation with attractive offers, framing techniques and little attention to the customer’s needs awakes the negative reaction.

In addition, there are two more factors that build marketplace metacognition, such as degree of interest in the subject of selling and

knowledge about salesperson's company by the prospect which may be the reason to be trusted or not. (Roux 2008.)

Reason why marketplace metacognition behavior is repeating when prospect gets new telesales calls is hidden in the telesales operator's behavior. As long as they start to be unprofessional, previous experience and memories arrive to the mind and prospect does not want to carry on the conversation. Even though, sometimes, if customer just wants to have overview of the market, prices and offers, (s)he might just listen in order to obtain the information. However, this is rare case when needs of the customer are touched by the subject of the phone call. (Roux 2008.)

Talking about telesales behavior, there are several things, which cause irritation and even anger in the prospects' minds. First one is lack of attention to the needs of prospect during the conversation. Second one is argumentative insistence together with tone of the voices provokes the customer for the negative emotions. Third one is telesales agent's irritation in the voice, which happens when telesales agent feels that his persuasion attempt did not have positive effect. Last one is telesales agent's manipulative technique, which concerns about creating reaction of surprise from the prospect by introducing agent as a person who was recommended by the acquaintance prospect might have known before. Last thing really makes customers angry at first, as they feel embarrassed that they did not remember that "acquaintance" and then, when they had realized that they were fooled, anger comes as a defensive reaction. All in all, these four irritation things can be mitigated by polite and respecting approach from the side of telesales agent and high level of attention and empathy from him. (Roux 2008.)

After deeper understanding of reasons behind the customer resistance, researcher discovered a basic model of the behavior for the prospect during the telesales call. Firstly, there is a stage of "polite listening", then comes "avoidance tactics". Avoidance tactics allows prospect to get away from the answering with respect to the salesman. Last stage is "refusal" when prospect realizes that he cannot bear this insisting conversation anymore and therefore, starts to be annoyed, angry and act impulsively. (Roux 2008.)



As a summary of this sub-chapter, Table 1 was built in order to give short overview of the situational factors influencing perception of telesales and raising the resistance towards it. (Roux 2008.)

TABLE 1. List of Situational Factors Influencing Perception of Telesales (Roux 2008)

<b>Cognitive factors</b>	<b>Emotional factors</b>
Nature of telesales presentations	Telesales agent's behavior
Level of interest in telesales subject	Time of calling
Knowledge about salesperson's company	Prospect's mood and previous experience

To sum up, this chapter has provided a general picture of the prospect reaction for the researcher and the reader of the thesis.

## 6 DEVELOPMENT PLAN

This chapter is the main part of the thesis, which contains development plan for the Company X NEE regarding telesales. The development plan is built on the key issues that were discovered by CST employees during the interviewing and by the author of the thesis during collecting data about telesales.

## 7 CONCLUSION

This chapter is dedicated to closing the thesis. It gives a brief overview of thesis outcomes in the form of answers for research questions. This is presented in sub-chapter one. Sub-chapter two provides evaluation of the thesis in terms of validity and reliability. Chapter closes with suggestion for further improvement, which is described in sub-chapter three.

### 7.1 Answers to the Research Questions

Before answering main research question, author gives answers to the research sub-questions:

#### **1) What is the difference between telesales and telemarketing?**

Telemarketing is the service, which makes prospects interested through telephone marketing by telling about product/services features, usefulness and profitability. Telesales is service, which turns opportunities into customers, meaning that it provides the basis of an agreement over the phone for the future collaboration between prospect and company.

#### **2) How did telesales campaign start in Company X?**

It started because of the new corporate strategy, which was created for the regional directors of sales and marketing for the purpose of increasing sales by raising brand awareness. Telesales was one of the major parts of this strategy.

#### **3) What was experience and challenges connected with telesales for CST employees?**

In general for the whole region the experience had been good so far.

#### **4) How did telesales work out for the Company X?**

According to the marketing director and CST employees, telesales brought a positive impact to the corporate sales activity in the NEE region. New customers were discovered through the telesales. In addition, old customers, who had not ordered for several years, began cooperation with Company X again.

#### **5) How do prospects feel when they get a cold call?**

There is a phenomenon called “customer resistance” which occurs often with answering the cold-calls. “Customer resistance” is a behavior, characterized by opposing attitude towards cold calling from the beginning of the call due to the previous negative experience with it. Nowadays this behavior occurs more often because companies use telesales services more frequently.

When answers for research sub-questions has been given, author is ready to answer the main research question:

*How to improve implementation of telesales campaign, so that it will be normal everyday practice for CST employees and effective in generating corporate planned outcomes?*

Thesis author had set the number of the objectives, which was advisable for case company to complete in order to improve the telesales. The objectives were formed into the development plan. The author believes that completion of objectives leads to improvement of telesales for Company X NEE.

## 7.2 Validity and Reliability

According to O'Reilly and Kiyimba (2015) research is meaningless without precision in reliability and validity of the data used because without it research cannot be qualified as credible and trustworthy.

Validity concerns about credibility of claims made after the empirical study has been done. There are two important aspects of qualitative research, which puts validity of research under the question: data collection and interpretation. Accuracy of data collection and process of interpretation approve and confirm the trustworthiness of research results. (O'Reilly & Kiyimba 2015.)

For the purpose of research there was conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with CST employees of Company X NEE and marketing director NEE. Since interviews were face-to-face or via live conversations on Skype, interviewer had a chance ask additional questions to clarify interviewees' answers. Afterwards, qualitative data was collected via voice recording, which allowed precise and accurate transcription of the answers on the paper without losing the peculiarities of the speech, self-corrections

and storytelling. Moreover, written transcription of what was answered was adequately written word-by-word, which allowed deeper analysis of what has been said by interviewees. Interview interpretation was conducted in the form of classical research model which allowed data analysis be completed by logical reasoning. Consequently, data was precisely collected and logically interpreted which makes this research valid.

Furthermore, reliability of qualitative research applies to the degree of consistency with which data examples were collected while conducting research (Silverman 2013). For the semi-structured interview author prepared one set of questions, which was applied to every interviewee. Since IDI was conducted in semi-structured way, it allowed small differences in the order of questions, their formulation and adding more questions in order to diminish misunderstandings between interviewer and interviewee. Since these small changes were made in order to build rapport with interviewees, author does not consider them having influence on the research consistency. Therefore, this research approves to be reliable.

### 7.3 Suggestions for Further Research

During writing process of the thesis, author came up with three additional issues, which could be solved while conducting new researches.

First one concerns about prospect perspective on the B2B telesales calling. It would be useful for other researched in sales field to initiate a qualitative research in this area, discovering deeper the “customer resistance” phenomenon while collecting primary data.

Second issue concerns analysis of Company X telesales actions during the next year. Since telesales is ongoing project, it can be under continuous analysis every year, in order to keep telesales upgraded and efficient.

## 8 SUMMARY

The objective of the thesis is to support the implementation of telesales in Company X NEE by creating a development plan. It was created for the duration of one year. The development plan is based on the CST feedback report, which was made by thesis author. This report was built on the primary data, which was collected from CST employees in the form of semi-structured in-depth interviews.

This thesis aims at giving brief overview on the telesales as a case in the corporate sales activity. That is why there is provided a wide secondary data research on the sales concepts, explanation place of telesales in the selling cycle and discovering of decision-making behavior of prospects who had received cold calls.

As it was said, theoretically thesis provide secondary data research on the concepts and terms which are used in the corporate sales field. Moreover, it provides the explanation on the differences between telesales and telemarketing and why exactly telesales was chosen for fulfilling corporate targets.

Empirically, qualitative research method is used in order to give versatile report about telesales implementation in Company X NEE, which also answers the research question of the thesis. In addition, report provides strong base for the development plan.

All things considered, research question has been answered and credible findings were provided in the form of report and development plan. As for research, author suggests consider qualitative research on the prospect perspective of telesales calling and by this discover the “customer resistance” phenomenon in B2B cold calling

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